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Divisions, Dialogue, and the Catholicity of the Church

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'Who would be drawn to a community whose discourse is filled with rancor, mistrust and hatred?'

—Bishop Donald Wuerl

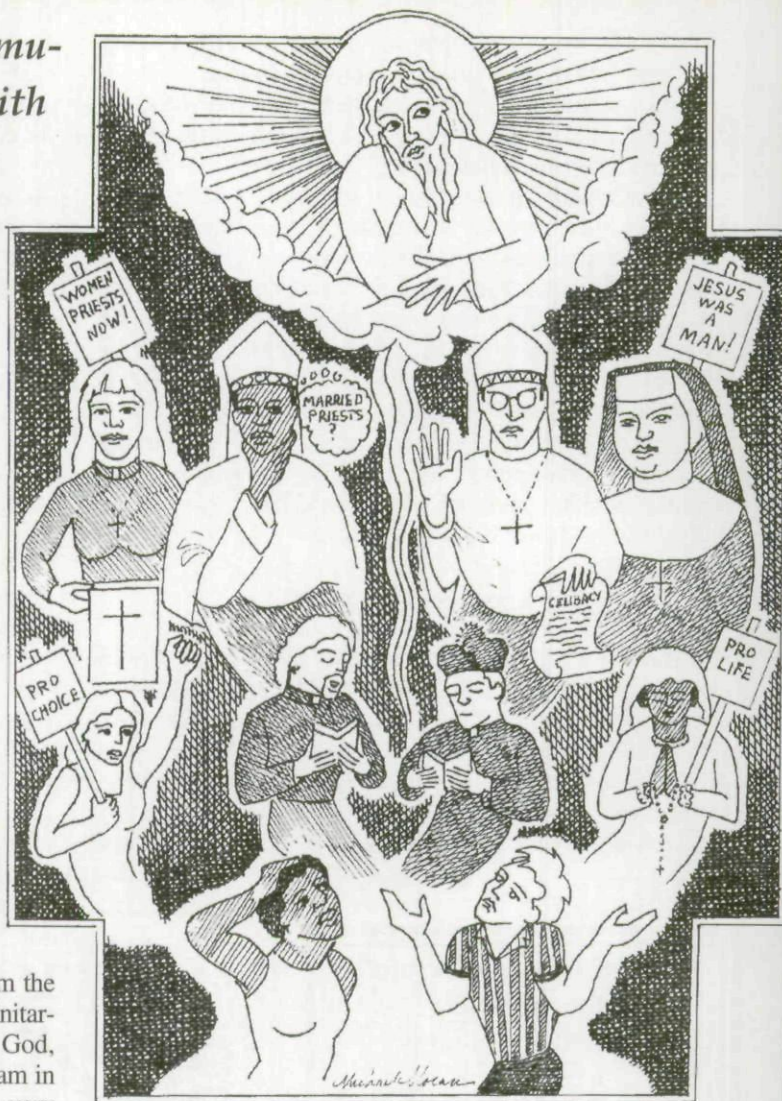
Divisions, Dialogue and the Catholicity of the Church

By THOMAS P. RAUSCH

RECENTLY I WAS ASKED TO PRESIDE at a Mass for an assembly of women religious. Before the liturgy began, I was given a script to follow for the prayers. The script carefully banished the words "Father," "Lord" and "kingdom" from the text. The blessing at the end was not the traditional Trinitarian formula but an inclusive invocation: "May our God, Creator, Redeemer and Life-giving Spirit bless us." I am in favor of inclusive language. But one needs to move very carefully when dealing with the historic symbols of our faith. By predicating Creator, Redeemer and Life-giving Spirit of God and by eliminating (however inadvertently) the mutual relationship between Father and Son, this formula seems to eliminate the distinction of persons and, thus, the doctrine of the Trinity. Even more, it depersonalizes God.

Despite my misgivings about the text, it obviously represented a pastoral effort to pray in a more inclusive fashion, one that moved beyond the androcentric character of so much of our God-language. But other examples are more extreme. In a recent issue of *The National Catholic Reporter*, there was a story of a eucharistic ritual called "A Critical Mass." It opened with a priest in traditional vestments processing in and intoning, "In the name of the Father..." at which point a horn was blown and dancers emerged, a sign that the priest should make his exit so that all the others

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gathered could take over the service. This is an extreme example, but, as one of the organizers said, similar women's liturgies with non-ordained presiders are being celebrated across the country and around the world.

ONE COULD LIST an equal number of examples of hardened attitudes, separatist practices, actions against the communion of the church from the right. On some campuses very conservative Catholic students, instructed by some even more conservative faculty members, will not serve at Mass as lectors or eucharistic ministers—because "that is what priests are supposed to do." This sounds very much like the neo-clericalism of Opus Dei. It is clearly contrary to what the liturgical norms allow. One professor encouraged a student in the campus ministry adult initiation program to participate instead in the R.C.I.A. at another parish that regularly offered the Tridentine Mass. On one campus, students belonging to a very conservative institute were accustomed to attend campus ministry liturgies, not to wor-

ART: MICHAEL MORAN, C.P.

ship but to report liturgical infractions; now they have their own liturgies with their priest advisors.

We all have our collections of anecdotes, from both sides. But beyond these, there are serious problems, groups and movements whose members are increasingly locked into angry, no-compromise positions. There are many today who are openly contemptuous of magisterial and particularly papal authority. Others reject the leadership of the U.S. bishops and appeal over their heads to Rome. What is at risk is the life of the church community itself as a community of love and service.

THE CATHOLIC LEFT

On the left there are an increasing number of advocacy groups: Dignity, an organization for gay and lesbian Catholics; Corpus, which advocates the return of former priests to active ministry; the Women's Ordination Conference; Call To Action; We Are the Church—all pushing for change, often in ways that directly challenge church teaching and ecclesiastical authority.

More serious is the growing chasm between professional theology and the life and faith of the church. Discussing the development of theology as a professional discipline in Catholic universities, Marquette's Patrick Carey has demonstrated that Catholic theology after Vatican II became increasingly academic, moving away from the moral and pastoral concerns that had earlier characterized the discipline. By 1967, when the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine changed its name to the College Theology Society, Carey believes that a concern for the religious lives of the students had become "an obsolete relic of a now defunct system." His conclusion calls for a rethinking of the task of college theology in order to address issues such as the intellectualism in the discipline that ignores the religious development of the person, the ignored or lost Catholic identity of many departments and the religious illiteracy of so many college students.

The problems Carey speaks of are very real. The contextual emphasis in contemporary scholarship has led to increasingly specialized theologies—liberation, feminist and ecological—focussing on the interests of particular disadvantaged groups. Feminist theology, for example, has been subdivided into feminist, "womanist" and "mujerista" theology (for white-middle-class, African-American and Hispanic women, respectively). Influenced by postmodernism, these contextual theologies tend to regard all knowledge as politically constructed on the basis of issues of power, gender, ethnicity and social status. In order to address current issues in church and society, they frequently "deconstruct" the tradition, substituting new orthodoxies and sometimes alternative histories. For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ignoring the evidence of the leadership role of the Twelve in the primitive church, reconstructs primitive Christianity as a "discipleship of equals" in order to address her feminist concerns. Her book on Christology presents a Jesus who saw God not as Abba, despite the multiple attestations



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of this in the tradition, but as Divine Sophia, a female Wisdom figure, and himself as Sophia's prophet. She goes so far as to criticize even Rosemary Ruether for a "heavy reliance on the historical Jesus," which is troublesome to her because it remains bound to an understanding of Jesus in masculine terms.

Many of these theologies seem more ideological than evangelical or religious. It is not at all clear that they are capable of or even interested in leading others to that "personal and profound meeting with the Savior" called for by Pope John Paul II in his 1990 encyclical on evangelization, *Redemptoris Missio* (No. 44).

In consequence, conservative Catholics do not trust the theology of the academy; they object that it has demythologized the Bible into meaningful stories rather than narratives that have anything to do with history, deconstructed the authority of the church and its ordained ministry, substituted a permissive sexual ethics for traditional Catholic morality, and transformed Catholic theology into the ideological agenda of contemporary liberal culture. The fact that so many Catholic students are unable to give an account of what salvation means or summarize the message of the Gospel in concrete terms seems to them to confirm their negative judgment. Nor are such critics simply exaggerating. They have some legitimate concerns.

Last semester I had three first year Catholic university students say on their final papers that they appreciated working through the biblical and theological foundations of the Eucharist, because they had not been aware of the doctrine of the real presence. I have found a similar ignorance of basic doctrines in other classes. Yet in many lower-division classes, Catholic students are introduced to all the controverted areas of contemporary theology and shown how to deconstruct contested positions before they are really familiar with the tradition out of which they are supposed to address these questions.

THE PROBLEM of theological illiteracy and ignorance of the Catholic tradition among young Catholics is very real, and the theological academy is not without some responsibility. The Rev. Richard McBrien likes to point out, correctly, that theology is different from catechesis. But when young adult Catholics are so poorly instructed in the basics of their faith, those teaching theology in Catholic universities cannot ignore the kerygmatic and religious dimen-

sions of their discipline. On the other hand, the answer is not to be found by turning to the theology of the Catholic right wing, which too often approaches church teaching with a fundamentalism about the papal magisterium, an approach that pays little heed to questions of interpretation, is unable to recognize development or change and presupposes a monarchical ecclesiology. Such theology offers certainty at the price of real biblical and historical foundation, a perfect example of what Michael Novak once called "non-historical orthodoxy."

THE CONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC SUBCULTURE

Catholic conservatism is by no means homogeneous. As Michael Cuneo has shown in his fascinating book, *The Smoke of Satan* [see *AM.*, 12/6/97], the Catholic right in the U.S. consists of a vast subculture of conservatives, neo-conservatives, various Marian cults centered on apparitions of Mary (often accompanied by apocalyptic messages of impending doom), anti-abortion activists and separatists who are in fact in schism.

The mainstream Catholic conservative movement represents an ultramontane position, a magisterial maximalism that sees all questions in the contemporary church as resolvable simply by appealing to the papal magisterium. For this group, acceptance of *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical on artificial contraception, is the touchstone of orthodoxy. Representatives include *The Wanderer*, an arch-conservative Catholic newspaper founded in 1867 for German immigrants; Catholics United for the Faith (C.U.F.), founded in 1968 by H. Lyman Stebbins, a convert to Catholicism; the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, a society for conservative Catholic academics founded in 1977 by Msgr. George A. Kelly, which finds the work of even careful mainstream scholars like Raymond Brown, S.S., and Avery Dulles, S.J., dangerous; and Helen Hull Hitchcock's Women for Faith and Family, founded in 1984.

There are also some more recent groups such as Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), a new group of Catholic apologists, several conservative Catholic colleges, such as the Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio), Christendom College (Front Royal, Va.), and Thomas Aquinas College (Santa Paula, Calif.), as well as a number of new publications, advocacy groups or mail order ministries, some using the Internet. In this group could be mentioned the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, currently headed by William Donohue. The league

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has gained considerable prominence of late for its battle against the Disney-produced ABC series, "Nothing Sacred," though many have objected to the league's attempt to speak for all Catholics. On the extreme edge of mainline conservatives one could add Fidelity magazine, founded in 1981 by E. Michael Jones.

A second group, often described as "neoconservative," emerged in the late 1970's. Though it is usually identified with Michael Novak, the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel, some would include long-time conservative political writers like William F. Buckley and Patrick Buchanan. A central concern of the neoconservatives is the defense of what Novak calls "democratic capitalism," though they are also strong in their critique of feminism, abortion and what is seen as the social agenda of the gay community. George Weigel describes them as taking up the challenge laid down by John Courtney Murray, S.J., "to devise a religiously grounded moral philosophy for the American experiment."

The "new apologists," a group of Catholics popularizing a polemical apologetics that has much in common with Protestant fundamentalism, represent another new movement. Some are academics, like Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, S.J., at Boston College, Scott Hahn at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, and Mitch Pacwa, S.J. Many are converts, among them Dale Vree, Kreeft, Hahn and his wife, Kimberly, Thomas Howard and Sheldon Vanauken (d. 1996), all of them associated with *The New Oxford Review*. In speaking of their conversions, they express a common concern for the state of contemporary Christianity, pointing in particular to the ordination of women, the increasing acceptance of homosexuality and abortion and the lack of an authoritative magisterium in their former Protestant churches.

One of the most popular of the new apologists is Karl Keating, the director of a lay organization called Catholic Answers that publishes a monthly journal of apologetics, *This Rock*, designed to help Catholics counter the arguments of Protestant fundamentalists. Lately however, Keating claims to be turning his energies to "dissenters and heretics within the church" like those in the Call to Action movement.

PARTICULARLY TROUBLING is the fact that many conservative Catholic groups skillfully exploit the differences between the U.S. bishops, who are trying to hold together a diverse and pluralistic church, and Rome. The Wanderer regularly attacks bishops with whom it disagrees, providing the addresses of Roman Curial officials and encouraging readers to write directly with their complaints. C.U.F. and the Roman Catholic Faithful, a group based in Illinois, do the same. The latter campaigns on the World Wide Web against "Bishops who are at war with Christ and His Holy Church." Joseph Fessio, S.J., founder of Ignatius Press, has gone to Rome in his battle against the U.S. bishops' efforts to introduce a moderate inclusive-language lec-

tionary; he urges a liturgical "reform of the reform" that recommends using only the first eucharistic prayer (the Roman canon), celebrating the Eucharist with the priest's back to the people, increased use of Gregorian chant and Latin, reinstalling Communion rails and limiting liturgical ministries to men and boys.

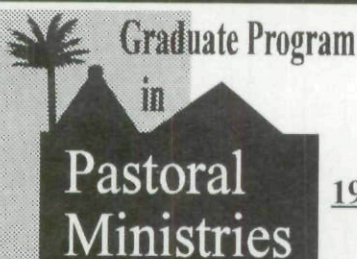
The November 1997 issue of Father Fessio's Catholic World Report takes the bishops to task for their efforts at liturgical renewal, their struggle to develop a more inclusive liturgical language, for their pastoral letter "Always Our Children," which reaches out to the parents of gay and lesbian Catholics, and for cooperating with professional societies like the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Canon Law Society and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. In a hostile response to Cardinal Roger Mahony's recent pastoral letter on the Eucharist, on Nov. 12, 1997, EWTN's Mother Angelica used her nationally syndicated program, "Mother Angelica Live," to accuse the Cardinal of teaching that the eucharistic bread and wine remain unchanged; she expressed the hope that Catholics in the archdiocese would give him "zero" obedience.

On the West Coast, three ultraconservative papers, the San Diego News Notes, the Los Angeles Lay Catholic Mission and The Faith, in the San Francisco Bay area—all funded by a conservative Catholic publisher—regularly attack the Cardinal Archbishop of Los Angeles in especially ugly

terms. Criticizing the ministries and educational programs of the Archdiocese, particularly its ministry to gays and lesbians and its annual religious education congress, the largest in the country, these papers well deserve the adjective "mean-spirited." One article, entitled "The Only Thing Missing Was the Golden Calf," attacked the closing liturgy at the 1996 congress at which Cardinal Mahony presided, quoting two congress observers who called it "pagan" and "blasphemous."

UNFORTUNATELY these nonprofessional papers, with their biased reporting, are regularly supported by other parts of the Catholic community that should be more responsible. The Lay Catholic Mission usually carries three advertisements from Ignatius Press, as well as an occasional ad from Our Sunday Visitor.

How can the Catholic church remain a community united in faith and mission? Many on the right advocate uncompromising adherence to what they understand as the received tradition; they try to maintain, in the face of contrary evidence, that church teaching does not develop, that what is needed is not dialogue but clear and authoritative teaching, that all the answers to contemporary questions can be found in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that those who do not agree should leave. But such an approach is neither wise nor Catholic. Others on the left seem to think that



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welcoming the changes they advocate would immediately give the church new life and vitality, heedless of the growing anxiety on the right and the threat of further fragmentation.

THE LATE CARDINAL Joseph Bernardin's Common Ground Initiative was an attempt to deal with the growing polarization that so often characterizes internal Catholic debates and fractures Catholic life. He wrote, "A mood of suspicion and acrimony hangs over many of those most active in the church's life; at moments it even seems to have infiltrated the ranks of bishops." His initiative, proposed practically from his deathbed, was criticized by four of the U.S. cardinals. Only Cardinal Mahony stood with Bernardin.

TRUTH IS GREATER

I would like to propose some principles that might prove helpful, a way of remembering that the truth is always greater than ourselves, that it encompasses more than our own concerns at any particular moment.

Catholic Inclusivity.

Catholicism by its very nature is inclusive. It erects a big tent. The adjective "catholic," from the Greek *kath'holou*, means "referring to the whole," "total" or "universal." It was first applied to the church in the sense of "whole" or "universal" by Ignatius of Antioch about the year A.D. 115. As early as the third and fourth centuries the word "catholic" was being used to distinguish the great or true church from groups or movements separate from it. Those who separated themselves were called "heretics," from the Greek word *hairein*, meaning "to take" or "to choose," in the sense of taking a part rather than the whole. In other words, heresy means being sectarian rather than catholic.

Legitimate Diversity.

The opposite of sectarianism is a concern for unity, for holding diversity and unity together in one communion. An old cliché has it that when a Protestant Christian comes up with a new understanding of the Gospel or a new insight into the Christian life, he or she establishes another church, whereas a Catholic in the same position founds a religious order, a community within the church that gives expression to a special charism for Christian life or service. Yes, a cliché, but like all clichés, an expression that embodies a certain truth.

The important point is that Catholicism is open to all truth

and to diverse expressions of the truth. It is not the product of a single reformer or historical movement in post-New Testament Christian history. It does not find its identity in a single doctrine, like Lutheranism, with its emphasis on justification by faith alone. Unlike Reformed or Calvinist Christianity, it is not based on a single theological tradition. It is not defined by a single liturgical text, as is Anglicanism, which finds its principle of unity in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Nor is it bound to a single method of biblical interpretation, like evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism,

bound to a confessional notion of biblical inerrancy. To be Catholic is to be open to truth in all its expressions, to whatever is genuinely human or naturally good.

Thus Catholicism includes within itself a wide variety of theologies, spiritualities and expressions of Christian life. It is pluralistic in its approach to the truth. Where the Reformation followed an "either/or" approach, Catholicism prefers to say "both/and." Not Scripture alone, but Scripture *and* tradition; not grace alone, but grace *and* nature; not faith alone, but faith *and* works.

Theological Humility.

In a time of transition and change, it is important to realize that not every question can be answered by citing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or The National Catholic Reporter. There are many things we simply do not know, and new questions that we are not yet able to answer. The N.C.R. is good for what's going on in the contemporary church, but it is not the font of all wisdom. The new catechism is a useful compendium of Catholic doctrine, but it does not reflect modern scholarship or address all contemporary concerns. Pope John Paul II speaks of it in his introduction as a "reference text" for catechisms prepared in various regions. It is not intended to provide answers for new questions. Therefore we need a certain theological humility.

The church today is confronted by many difficult questions that need honest discussion, among them, the shortage of priests and the right of communities to the Eucharist, a more collegial style of church leadership, allowing the laity some participation in its decision-making processes and the formulation of its teaching, addressing the special concerns of women, minorities, the divorced, and those in mixed marriages, renewing its ethical teaching particularly in the area of sexuality and allowing for greater adaptation and inculturation at local levels and in different cultures. These are challenges as great as any in the church's history; and they arise, not out of a modern secular spirit, but precisely

*The church needs
both its visionary builders
and its social activists,
its pastors and its prophets;
and they need each
other.*

out of those currents of renewal unleashed by the Second Vatican Council. To address them we need to return to the biblical, liturgical and patristic sources of our tradition as well as to take account of what we've learned from the social sciences and from other churches. We need not just to talk but to listen to each other; we need prayer, discernment and the freedom to be led by the Spirit.

Respect for the Other.

Recently Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh issued a pastoral letter to his diocese entitled, "Speaking the Truth in Love: Christian Discourse Within the Church." Linking mutual respect with the church's fundamental evangelical mission, he asked: "Who would be drawn to a community whose discourse is filled with rancor, mistrust and hatred? We cannot highlight evangelization and then destroy its fondest hopes by the way we talk with or about one another."

How can we learn to speak the truth as we see it in love rather than in rancor? We cannot do so without the willingness to presume good will on the part of the other, without reaching out in some way to the other party.

In Los Angeles, the widely publicized differences between Cardinal Mahony and the Los Angeles Catholic Worker over the Cardinal's plan to build a new cathedral provides a good example of a tentative but genuine dialogue

between opposing parties. The conflict is a classic one. Ever since city engineers ordered St. Vibiana's Cathedral closed because of the damage from the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the Cardinal has been finding land and raising money to build a new one, struggling against a militant conservancy organization that tried to force the restoration of a hopelessly inadequate structure. The Los Angeles Catholic Worker community has opposed his plan from the beginning, arguing that the money, given by donors specifically for the cathedral, would be better spent on the poor.

THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER of demonstrations, symbolic "liberations" of the old cathedral and critical articles in *The Catholic Agitator*, the Worker's paper. But the conversation has not broken down. The Workers met with the Cardinal in his office, a rather difficult meeting, judging from the subsequent article in *The Catholic Agitator*. Later the Cardinal asked if he might not come and celebrate the Eucharist with the Workers in their skid row soup kitchen; when he did, on the Feast of the Transfiguration, he astonished them by acknowledging that their commitment to the poor and their opposition to the cathedral was an important message for the church. He told them that they must never stop speaking it, and expressed his concern that their present conflict would not prevent them from working together on issues that affect the poor.

The Cardinal's gesture did not resolve the conflict. Some of the Workers were tempted to dismiss his gesture as a political ploy. At the dedication of the new cathedral site, they were there in protest. In a subsequent Op-Ed piece, Jeff Dietrich, one of the leaders of the community, acknowledged that the Workers were flying in the face of 1,500 years of church tradition in opposing the cathedral and admitted as well the part his own unresolved issues with authority played in the conflict. He concluded: "We will continue to reject the cardinal's cathedral.... But this struggle with the church is no mere political battle. It is more akin to a family fight around the dinner table. Passions are high, tensions are personal, unresolved inner demons are ubiquitous. But still there is this sense of an unbreakable bond between ourselves and the cardinal, renewed in the sharing of food and the acknowledgement of mutual humanity."

Dietrich's answer could not be more Catholic. The church needs both its visionary builders and its social activists, its pastors and its prophets; and they need each other. What is important here is that even in intense disagreement, there was mutual respect, gestures of outreach and unbroken communion. There is much here to teach us.

ALIVE AND HEALTHY

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American Catholic [see AM., 11/22/97], "the people in the parishes are, in the main, more sensible than extremists in the professorate. They are not radical feminists, cultic 'earth-goddess' worshipers, Marxist poststructuralists, or feckless hedonists who seek an end to all rules." But neither are they convinced that the ancient structure of the Catholic Church will collapse if Catholics use a more inclusive language in their prayer, stand during the eucharistic prayer, welcome and support their gay and lesbian children or disagree with the Pope over birth control or the ordination of women.

The Rev. Andrew Greeley has argued that as the Catholic population drifts to the left, the real problem is not polarization so much as it is the growing alienation of Catholics from their leadership. The statistical indicators of change he offers suggest that he is right. But as the bishops try to walk the tightrope between their restive flock and Rome, there seems to be far more thunder from the right.

What the church needs, however, is not thunder, but more listening on all sides, liberals and conservatives, theologians and their critics, laity and members of the hierarchy, bishops and Rome. We've got to find a way to turn down the volume and—without abandoning our sense of what is truly important—step beyond our personal certainties and absolutist positions. We need to find ways to acknowledge our own failings and reach out to those who

see things differently, so that we may rediscover the good in one another and the truth in positions different from our own.

WE NEED ALSO to find ways to address the theological illiteracy and ignorance of the tradition that afflicts so many young Catholics without having recourse to a non-historical orthodoxy or a magisterial fundamentalism. We need good, critical theology as well as courses in the riches of the Catholic tradition.

In an article in *Theological Studies* in 1996, William Shea of St. Louis University argues that Catholics need to pay more attention to the Protestant fundamentalist critique of Catholic belief and practice, including the charge made by so many Catholic converts to fundamentalist churches that they "never heard the Gospel" in a Catholic church. That charge may sometimes be true. If we continue to reduce our faith to an agenda of issues, whether of the right or the left, we won't have much to offer those who should be the Catholics of the next generation. Worse, we will have missed the chance to bring them and so many others into that personal and profound meeting with the Savior called for by Pope John Paul II. This is the real work of the church, not self-maintenance or even reconstruction, but evangelization. **A**

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